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My Grandmother's Lilacs

by Mike Emery

Life so full of questions, young and old:
Questions knocked with heavy fists
Against the inside and the outside of my skull,
Hammering insistently for as long as I remember
Questions searching out the gates
Through which to integrate the tried and true
In concert with the challenging and new.

Mind, wander vaguely back in years,
Persistent stumbling over celebrations,
Outrage, loves, and fears and grieves,
Back to that paradise of ignorant absurdity
Before I was well enough acquainted
With my mind to know what it was for,
Back before the questions began to
Colonize my brain like rumors of plague.

Back to the time of my grandmother's lilacs;
She had five bushes, all purple, never pruned.
We called it the jungle, so immense
To our four- and five-year-old imaginations.
We were not to dare beyond the blossoms
To explore the rocks and sagebrush out beyond
For fear of drowning in the little trickling creek
Where there were water skimmers
Dancing in the pools between the rocks
And darning needle dragonflies
That would sew your mouth shut
If you let them get too close.

But when older guardian eyes
Looked otherwise, we squirmed
Between the suckers and out of supervision's sight
To venture in the widening world
And inhale the sweet deep purple blossom
Scent of liberation tinged with sage.
Our fathers all were gone to war.
What had we to question?

